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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide a socio-historical perspective on the continuity and change of the Chinese press in Hong Kong. Divided into four sections, the paper examines (1) the partisan press structure as a microcosm of China's interparty struggle; (2) the rise of the market-oriented centrist press since 1970 as a result of Hong Kong's economic growth and autonomy; (3) the causes and consequences, and possibilities and constraints of press freedom under British colonial rule; and (4) the erosion of the rightist press as juxtaposed with Hong Kong's prospective return to China in 1997. (Author/HOD)

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THE PARTISAN PRESS IN HONG KONG: Between British Colonial Rule and Chinese Politics

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THE PARTISAN PRESS IN HONG KONG:
Between British Colonial Rule and Chinese Politics

Hong Kong is a birthplace of the modern Chinese press. The press in Hong Kong has attempted to effect changes in modern Chinese politics, which in turn have profoundly determined the partisan press structure in Hong Kong. This paper provides a socio-historical perspective on (1) the partisan press structure as a microcosm of China's inter-party struggle; (2) against that backdrop, the rise of the market-oriented, centrist press since 1970 as a result of Hong Kong's economic growth and autonomy; (3) the causes and consequences, possibilities and constraints of press freedom under British colonial rule; (4) the erosion of the rightist press as juxtaposed with Hong Kong's prospective return to China in 1997.

Incommensurate with its tiny geographic size, Hong Kong carries heavy historical weights. It is a birthplace of the modern Chinese press and a beacon of press freedom in modern history. The press in Hong Kong has attempted to effect changes in modern Chinese politics, which in turn have profoundly determined the press structure in Hong Kong. The press, a microcosm of modern China, is symbolic of the split between Communist China and Taiwan since 1949, each waging a brutal propaganda war at the other. Against this backdrop, a group of Hong Kong-oriented centrist newspapers have emerged since 1970 and thrived on the expanding economy, possibly at the expense of the partisan (particularly the rightist) press.

The aim of this paper is to provide a socio-historical perspective on the continuity and change of the Chinese press in Hong Kong. Following a brief account of the Hong Kong press in modern Chinese politics, it proceeds to analyze the causes and consequences, possibilities and constraints of press freedom under British colonial rule. The structure of the Chinese press in Hong Kong is then correlated with China's irterparty struggle vis-a-vis Hong Kong's rising autonomy. The erosion of the rightist press is finally juxtaposed with Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignity in 1997.

I. HONG KONG: THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE MODERN CHINESE PRESS

The artillery of British imperialism forced an abruptly awoked isolationist Chinese empire into concading Hong Kong in 1842. Hong Kong gave birth to the modern Chinese press when this small island, previously inhabited by pirates, gradually developed to be an international commercial port and China's window to the West. Like the early press in many countries, the inauguration of modern Chinese press in Hong Kong around the 1850s owed much to the efforts of foreign missionaries and tradesmen with strong religious or commercial ambitions. Not until 1860 did the first Zhongwai Xinbao make its appearance as a Chinese edition of the English-language Daily Express, carrying translated shipping schedule and commodity price.

Because the Qing imperial empire and subsequent Nationalist and Communist regimes could not reach their repressive hands directly into foreign settlements, waves of intellectuals have taken refugee in Hong Kong (and the once colonial city of Shanghai) in the past century to advocate their political doctrines in the hope of saving China. Though sheltered in Hong Kong, they invariably fixed their mind on China.

Wang Tao, suspected of the Taiping rebellion connections, left Shanghai for Hong Kong, where he established Xuenhwan Ribao in 1874. Wang forcefully argued that China must learn western technology and system and be ruled by the people. He set a prime example for generations

of Chinese intellectuals to come who used the press as a means of political change.

Following this lead, constitutional monarchists founded Weixin Ribao in 1880. It soon feuded fiercely with Zhongguo Ribao (founded in 1899) and other revolutionary papers representing Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Tung Meng Huei. Zhongguo Ribao was supported with funds by overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Japan, and America; it operated not only as a propaganda machine but an organizational base of revolution. (note 1)

In the ensuing decades numerous prominent Communist figures, including Zhou Enlai, took temporary shelter in Hong Kong to escape imminent persecution. (note 2) Prior to 1949 Hong Kong's importance in the scheme of China's press was surpassed only by Shanghai, because Shanghai was endowed with a superior geographical location from which to penetrate a huge hinterland by excellent transportation and communication systems, and it was similarly under a British protective umbrella. Hong Kong was, by comparison, much more parochial and was considered a second-best alternative to Shanghai. Even so, in view of the tight press control inside China, the Hong Kong press had always been perceived to be more credible. (note 3)

But since Shanghai fell into the Communist hands in 1949, a bitter and prolonged struggle between the Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or the KMT) has been waged in Hong Kong. Both sides regard Hong

Kong as an indispensable outpost for propaganda, and the Chinese Hong Kong press can be rightly seen as amplifying this rift. Moreover, Hong Kong has served as the world's listening post for Mao's China and the Hong Kong press has provided for the world a glimpse of the relentless power struggles and policy shifts inside China. The Hong Kong press, except the leftist, was very critical of the Cultural Revolution and its criticism of the ultra-leftist wing of Communist leadership helped to pave way for Deng Xiao-ping's rehabilitation--a contribution acknowledged by the post-Mao regime. China's strategic importance has to be seen jointly in the light of colonial politics and modern China. These two aspects will be examined respectively.

II. PRESS FREEDOM UNDER COLONIAL RULE

Hong Kong is no democracy. It is ruled by a colonial administration which uninhibitedly concedes that democracy would be an affront. But in what has often been celebrated as "freedom without democracy," the level of press freedom in Hong Kong, defined as an absence of government censorship and persecution of the press, is second to Japan in Asia and perhaps unrivaled in Chinese history. This is to suggest neither that press freedom has always been perfectly safeguarded nor that British colonial rulers charitably believe in press freedom. The fact remains that Hong Kong is considered "free" relative to China's measure of control,

whether in the past or at present. How much this owes to the magnanimity of the colonial regime is open to debate; what is clear is that press freedom partakes of the British liberal tradtion and the democratic system of government in London to which the Hong Kong administration is ultimately held accountable.

Press freedom has always been granted within the framework of the colonial law. The press must not threaten the vital interests of British rule by attacking imperialism, colonialism or advocating the labor movement and class struggle. The colonial administration has been more aversive to the press that is anti-British rule than one that is critical of Chinese regimes unless such criticisms cause diplomatic embarrassments. In fact, the colonial ruler was most at ease with and had deepest faith in the motives of local businessmen who claimed to publish papers ostensibly for profit-making rather than for overt political aims. Many Chinese politicians and intellectuals, having left the mainland to seek temporary freedom from persecution in Hong Kong, had to hire local businessmen to submit registration on their behalf. Once approved, the permit could not easily be revoked even if the paper became highly political, because the British took pride in abiding by legality. The publishers, while carefully not to violate this anti-British taboo, have concentrated their minds and hearts on Chinese politics.(note 4)

In the contemporary context, press freedom may also be

regarded a necessity from strategic and tactical points of view. Strategically, it serves to consolidate the legitimacy of British rule amid the post-war era of national liberation by showing the colonial Hong Kong as a far more liberal place to live than its Chinese alternatives. Tactically, inasmuch as sentiments about China's partisan conflict cannot be ruled out they might be absorbed into the framework of Hong Kong, and press freedom allows the colonial regime to identify and bring into open sources of potential threat and opposition.

There are quite severe limits to what can be done in the way of colonial politics. Grass-roots democracy and popular political institutions have failed to emerge. Contending with no political parties or elected officials and representatives, the colonial administration rules in alliance with local elites and powerful business interest groups. It has absorbed, incorporated, or coopted a huge number of elites into its administrative machinery in order to tap their technical resources and gain their support (note 5). As one observer notes, Hong Kong's pattern of representation has hardly progressed beyond the nineteenth century as far as franchise extension is concerned. What has flourished is a "bureaucratic phenomenon", with a proliferation of the machinery of government effectively built on the traditional colonial administration. Hong Kong is an "administrative state."(note 6)

In this colonial "administrative state" press freedom is robust. Parallel to its economic non-interventionism, the

bureaucratic polity is careful not to intrude upon the social domain of Chinese life. Content with controlling the rules of the game, the polity often has to walk a fine line, perform a delicate balancing act, play one off against the other to gain ample room for maneuver. In this context, both sympathizers of mainland China and Taiwan are permitted to organize trade unions, publish partisan newspapers, and distribute propaganda insofar as they stay within the confines of the law and do not threaten the legitimacy of British rule. And for this reason the structure of the Hong Kong press has closely followed Chinese politics--a subject that will be explored in considerable depth.

The Press and the "Boundary Politics"

The Hong Kong government cannot be voted out of its office. But it has to maximize popular consent of its policy or, at a minimum, find a compromise that gives least offense. The government is therefore painfully attentive to public opinion, claiming that it may not be a government "by the people" but it is a government "for the people."(note 7) In this regard the press has asserted itself as a significant actor in what Lau calls the "boundary politics."(note 8)

The colonial polity, at once paternalistic and defensive, puts a primacy on preserving a stable environment in which creative energies can be fully devoted to the production of economic wealth. The government resolutely monopolizes political arena, while letting the Chinese

society mind its own social and cultural life through strong family systems and primordial ties. On the other hand, the predominantly lower-class strata of Hong Kong are those who opt to leave the mainland behind. Once bitten, twice shy: they abhor politics. They simply wish to pursue life in peace and prosperity without oppression. In addition, traditional Chinese political culture encourages a rather uncritical acceptance of, even devotion to, a benevolent authority. Therefore, as long as the colonial regime delivers economic goods (superior to mainland China) people would happily relinquish rights to challenge its power.

In short, there is little in the way of interaction or integration between the polity and society; society is largely free from state intervention. Both are boundary-conscious and wary of invading each other's domain. The press, in the absence of popular political institutions, has emerged as one of the major interlinking organizations at the boundary between the polity and society.

One of the most salient aspects of this "boundary politics" can be seen in the sharp rise of civil protests since the early 1970s. This is coterminous with the drastic change in demographic structure: the post-war "baby boon" generation--born and educated in Hong Kong, and under 30--for the first time became the majority, comprising 60% of the population. This demographic cohort, accepting Hong Kong as given life space and harboring a dim memory of the strife in old China, is more readily prepared than their refugee

parents to fight for legitimate rights. The growing complexity of the Hong Kong society has also gradually outstretched the capability of traditional social ties to manage. Meanwhile, with a sense of self-confidence gained from the forceful demonstration of popular support in the 1967 riot, the government has been more inclined to tolerate the outpouring of civil grievances. The riot showed that the populace did not seek to topple the colonial regime; it sought to have a readier access to the government. Ironically, the previous aversion to civil protests for fear of "rocking the boat" seems to have been obliterated by the combined factors of the governemnt's efforts to improve communication, the coming of the new gereration, and active coverage of such protests by the media.

It should be noted that most civil protests are gradualist, reformist, piecemeal, non-violent, informal, and ad hoc at best. While most pressure groups advocate single cause and comprise small numbers of active members, none intend to overthrow the colonial regime. The self-proclaimed pressure group leaders are invariably intellectuals--upwardly mobile, articulate, dedicated, and above all, media conscious. They seek change within the system. Lacking organization and resources, they have capitalized on the media institutions effectively with which to focus public (and hence the government's) attention on the issue, bypass bureaucratic corridors to exert more direct pressure on officials, and muster mass support for social change. The

media, in place of a political vacuum, have become indispensable resources for civil groups.

Equally conscious of the intricate "boundary politics," the government sets up a vast apparatus, the Government Information Office (GIS), to manage the flow of information to the press and to monitor public opinion through the press. The GIS was broadly expanded after the 1967 riot when the government was urged by a special commission to develop "a greater consciousness of the need for public relations at all levels," with singular emphasis put on the media.(note 9) All government departments are staffed with information units under the supervision of the GIS with a clear mission to deal with the press. A GIS pamphlet advised government officials to "say nothing" to reporters at cocktail parties or during business hours. No government officials are encouraged to talk to the press without the advice or participation of the GIS personnel. To interview an official, a journalist must contact the GIS and submit questions in advance; the official may refuse to answer questions not on the original list. The Daily News Bulletin, which the GIS furnishes to the press at no cost, enjoys a de facto monopoly on the flow of government news. The government is, however, prepared to respond to public pressure and has instructed officials to reply to letters of criticism in the press, particularly in the case of the police, education, and transport. The GIS publishes a daily English digest of the Chinese press (Gist) and a weekly extract of their editorials (Opinion) for the benefit of top

officials who are predominantly British expatriates.

The goal of the government and the GIS in particular is, again, not democracy, but to survey the range and intensity of public reactions to fine-tune administrative bureaucracy and to forestall public discontent. Public opinion is a safety valve. It is a negative check on the government: it can sometimes restrain the government from taking action, but it is not often successful in persuading the government to initiate a change. Press freedom in Hong Kong should be taken as an absence of government censorship rather than a right to participate in democratic politics.(note 10)

Heavily Regulated But Let Free

There are yet other paradoxes. Press freedom takes roots in the soil of a benign non-democracy, surviving numerous bureaucratic attempts at rigid regulations. Should the mass of exceedingly rigid, undemocratic ordinances and regulations be strictly enforced, Hong Kong would hardly have been a showcase for civility or a beacon of press freedom. Early on, the colonial regime has preferred to secure tough and restrictive laws at their disposal in case of contingencies but has refrained from invoking them. This freedom is further interwoven with partisan allegiance of the press to the two Chinese regimes.

Hong Kong was annexed in 1842 at a time when the British had little desire to increase its imperial territory but had unlimited ambitions for the extension of trade. Stability being the first imperative for trade, the British have tried

quite successfully to depoliticize Hong Kong from the start. But since the colonial authority cannot excessively alienate Chinese regimes or deny partisan forces, external pressure must be rationalized and absorbed into the internal security framework of Hong Kong. Press freedom, while serving to counter-balance antagonistic forces, reaches its upper limits when the security of Hong Kong is perceived to be in jeopardy. This dilemma partly explains the incongruence between high tolerance of press freedom and the harsh legal restrictions placed on the press in Hong Kong.

In the name of diplomacy a first restrictive law took effect in 1907. The colonial regime began to ban the Chinese press against publishing anything deemed derogatory to Qing emperors. A special issue of the revolutionary Min Bao, published in Shanghai and distributed by its Zhongguo Ribao ally in Hong Kong, was confiscated on the ground that it carried a cartoon depicting a beheaded Qing emperor. Any explicit mention of "imperialism" and the like was expressly prohibited. But as the revolutionary tide grew stronger, the Hong Kong government benignly neglected subtle anti-Manchurian propaganda. This enabled the press and revolutionary apparatus to base in Hong Kong from which to sow the seed of revolution in China.(note 11)

In 1943 the British surrendered all extra-territorial rights, settlements, and concessions in China. Curiously, Churchill refused to return Hong Kong. With single-mindedness and shrewdness the British have turned the once

sparsely populated, resourceless island into the world's third largest financial center, after New York and London but surpassing Tokyo. China, in spite of national pride and revolutionary rhetoric, has been extraordinarily tolerant of this historical paradox--because the colony accounts for approximately 40 percent (or US$8 billions annually) of China's foreign exchanges. With extreme tact, the colonial regime has kept a watchful eye on Communist infiltration while avoiding a direct confrontation with Beijing.

Hong Kong's ordinances now run into hundreds, of which over thirty hold direct relevance to the press. But from a political standpoint, of particular import to the press are Emergency Regulations, the Control of Publications Ordinance, the Sedition Ordinance, and the Public Order Ordinance.(note 12) When the Communist revolution in China opened a floodgate of refugees into Hong Kong in 1949, the situation was extremely testy and volatile, the Hong Kong government wasted no time in declaring Emergency Regulations which enpowered itself to censor or suspend agitative publications without explanation. The Control of Publications Ordinance, passed in 1951, further gives the government massive authority to punish any newspapers that publish matter "prejudicial to the security of Colony" or likely to alarm public opinion or disturb public order. Making an oblique reference to the CCP-KMT feud, that ordinance also considers it an offense to become a member of an unlawful society or "of a political group established outside the Colony."

A life imprisonment can be imposed, under the Treasonable Offenses Ordinance, upon any person who intends to deprive or depose the Queen of the United Kingdom, or to levy war against Her Majesty, etc. The Sedition Ordinance defines as punishable an intention to bring into hatred or to excite disaffection against the Hong Kong government, to raise racial or class discontent, or to incite violence. The Public Order Ordinance, passed following the 1967 riot, stipulates that the press shall not print any news about an unlawful assembly, defined as a gathering of 10 or more persons in a public place without a police permit.

To recapitulate, the Hong Kong government, extremely concerned even paranoid about stability, feels more secure in arming itself with illiberal ordinances--"just in case." The ignition of a small conflict might unleash political forces of unknown magnitude to inflict severe damages. If sentiments towards the CCP-KMT regimes cannot realistically be exterminated, the government might just as well try to manage the rightist-leftist conflicts by playing one group off against the other so that both can be canceled out. No wonder, the colonial regime has been so tolerant of partisan journalism.

The colonial regime has very seldom put press ordinances to practice. A notable exception to the rule occurred during the 1967 riot when 14 journalists were arrested on account of unlawful gatherings, three publishers of minor leftist papers were sentenced to three-year prison

terms on charge of sedition and publishing false information tending to induce persons to commit an offense. Also the three papers were suspended until the cases had been completed. This gesture was meant to signal a warning to such major agitators as Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po.

Very few journalists have scored as martyrs fighting for press freedom in Hong Kong. The mechanism of control is much more subtle. Though the British Official Secret Act of 1911 was modified by a 1978 Parliamentary white paper upon the recommendations of the Franks Commission in 1971, it remains in effect in Hong Kong, Section 2 of which declares illegal any press coverage of unauthorized official information. What the public knows about the government is thus highly controlled. The hegemonic position of the Government Information Office (GIS) facilitates information flow in a selective way, gaining control through voluntary cooperation and without overt coercion. The Political Department keeps a close watch explicitly on Communist and Nationalist agitators and tacitly on active members of the rising interest groups. An investigative report by New Statesman of London revealed that 11 pressure groups (including the prestigeous Hong Kong Observers) that constantly harnessed the media to social cause, had been on the government's watch list. Embarrassed by the revelation, the government at once disclaimed any intention to infiltrate or neutralize them.(note 13) A number of activist foreign journalists known to be linked with the disadvantaged groups have been denied visa

extensions and declared persona non-grata on various grounds. Lastly, questions arise as to whether the existing ordinances, if not rescinded, will entice the new regime after 1997 to play fire with press freedom. This only time can tell.

III.THE PRESS STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

As previously noted, the press structure in Hong Kong is jointly determined by the CCP-KMT struggle of China and the rather tolerant press policy of the colonial government. About 350 copies of newspapers are printed for every 1,000 population in Hong Kong, which is 3.5 times the world's average(102), ahead of the U.S. (289) and next to Japan (.07 copies) in Asia. Government statistics disclose that there are eight English-and 54 Chinese-language newspapers being published every day in 1987.(note 14) The universe of the Chinese press is so diverse and proliferated, partly encouraged by a lenient registration requirement (HK$10,000 safety deposit plus HK$100 annual fee), and partly because many papers operate on a shoestring budget: some are subsidized by the PRC and Taiwan, most are family owned. More than half of them devoted to horse-racing tips and entertainment gossip, need not concern us. A total of about 20 Chinese papers is considered worthy of daily monitoring by

the Government Information Office (GIS) in an effort to canvass the range of public opinion. Table 1 summarizes those major Chinese papers, which fall into four categories on the basis of political ideology and partisan allegiance:

(i) Leftist papers, such as Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po, are the organ of the CCP, referring to mainland China as "the motherland," "China", "the People's Republic of China," "Our Country", and Taiwan as "Taiwan," "the Taiwan province," or "the Chiang clique," and honoring the PRC's national day on October 1.

(ii) Centrist papers, such as Ming Pao and the Oriental Daily News, refer to mainland China as "China," "Communist China," "the Mainland," and Taiwan as "Taiwan" or "the Kuomintang government."

(iii) Mainstream conservative-rightist papers, such as Sing Tao Jih Pao and Wah Kiu Yat Po, refers to mainland China as "Communist China," "the Mainland," "the Communist Party," and Taiwan as "the Republic of China," "the Nationalist Party," "Taiwan," or "Free China," bearing "the Republic of China" on page head, and honoring Taiwan's national day on October 10.

(iv) The KMT-linked and -subsidized rightist papers, such as the Hong Kong Times and Kung Sheung Yat Po, call mainland China as "the Mainland," "the Chinese Communists," "the Communist bandits", and Taiwan as "the Republic of China," "Free China" or "the Taiwan province," bearing "the Republic of China" on page head, and honoring Taiwan's

national day on October 10.

As is apparent in Table 1, a lion's share of the circulation, and thus advertising revenues, is taken by a handful of thriving centrist and the mainstream conservative-rightist outlets. The rest has a minute readership. The political press of the left and the right, drawing on subsidies, does not depend on circulation or advertising for survival. Its key significance lies in the ability to define the boundary condition of the "marketplace of political ideas" in Hong Kong by reflecting the oppposing Chinese regimes' motives and interpretations.

TABLE 1 Political Ideology of the Hong Kong Chinese Press

Newspaper	Year Established	Estimated circulations 1967	1984
I. CCP-linked leftist:			
Ta kung Pao	1948	20,000	47,000
Wen Wei Po	1948	18,000	54,000
New Evening Post	1949	28,000	75,000
Ching Pao	1956	55,000	47.000

Hong Kong Commercial Daily	1952	60,000	83,000
II. Centrist:			
(a) Elite:			
Ming Pao	1959	80,000	405,000
HK Economic Journal	1973		69,000
Ming Pao Evening News	1969		35,000
(b) Mass:			
Centre Daily News	1980		20,000#
Oriental Daily News	1969		1,530,000
Sing Pao	1939	120,000	852,000
San Pao	1963	40.000	319,000
Tin Tin Jih Pao	1960	36,000	233,000
III. Mainstream Rightist:			
Sing Tao Jih Pao	1938	32,000	219,000
Wah Kiu Tat Po	1925	29,000	146,000
Express Daily	1963	65.000	138,000
Sing Tao Evening News	1938	130,000	180,000
Wah Kiu Evening News	1945	22,000	----

IV. KMT-linked Rightist:			
Hong Kong Times	1949	21,000	40,000#
Kung Sheung Yat Po	1925	64,000	30,000##
Kung Sheung Evening News	1945	17,000	---- ##

Sources: Years of establishment and party affiliation are based on Yao-lan Lin, The History of Press Development in Hong Kong (Taipei: World, 1977), pp.170-174. Unless otherwise noted, the 1967 circulation figures are based on Yuet-lin Lee, The Role of the Hong Kong Press in the 1967 Riot (undergraduate thesis, in Chinese, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1981), appendix 2, and the 1984 figures are based on the findings of Survey Research Hong Kong.

Estimated figures.

Estimated figures; both closed on December 2, 1984.

It is best to analyze the structure of the Chinese press in Hong Kong in the light of the dynamic interaction between a main line (Chineseness) and a side line (Hongkongness). In the main, the press in Hong Kong is Chinese in character--serving as a listening post for China, reflecting its

political struggle and affected by it as a consequence. As a side line, there develops a distinct Hong Kong character, on top of and apart from its Chineseness. What is perceived to be the compelling interests and viewpoints of Hong Kong is put over and above a concern for China.

Both lines have adjusted themselves dialectically over the years. They are not mutually exclusive; they may coalesce or collide on different issues and in different stages. In a nutshell, the main line, that of Chineseness, was dominant between 1949 and 1970, submerging the Hong Kong character. But since 1970 a side line, that of the Hong Kong identity, has gained considerable strength. At times the side line partakes of, or is subsumed by, the main line; the press is primarily concerned with China and, by implication and secondarily, with Hong Kong. At other times, as brought to a head by the current apprehension about Hong Kong's autonomy after 1997, localness may take precedence over, even at the expense of, Chineseness.

To elaborate, before 1970 the structure of the Chinese press in Hong Kong was primarily an extension and a microcosm of the split China, focusing its major concern on the continuing rift between the KMT and the CCP. On the left, Ta Kung Pao and Wan Wei Pao have fought on behalf of Beijing, whereas on the right the Hong Kong Times is obliged to expose the Communist evils and contrast them with the supposed achievements by the KMT on Taiwan. Standing in between are the mainstream conservative establishment consisting of Sing

Tao Jih Pao (founded in 1938), Wah Kiu Yat Po (in 1922), and, in a different sense, Kung Sheung Yat Po (in 1922). The triad are responsive to the market of Hong Kong, supportive of status quo and the Hong Kong government policies. They garner enviable profits from the government's sanction as legally valid advertising outlets in the Colony. Perhaps out of historical ties with the KMT, they also display rightist tendencies and tilt toward Taiwan, all bearing the "Republic of China" on their page heads. When a riot escalated from a minor industrial conflict to embroilment in, as a spin-off of, the Maoist Cultural Revolution in 1967, the security of Hong Kong was put to a severe test, they helped put up effective counter-propaganda campaigns and mobilized a groundswell of support for the government. A commission appointed by the Governor to investigate the cause of the disturbances later in its report acknowledged their role as a stabilizing force.(note 15) To be sure, the rightist stance taken by Sing Tao and Wah Kiu is basically different from that of the Hong Kong Times or Kung Sheung--a point to which I shall return.

The Rise of the Centrist Press

Around 1970 a new Hong Kong identity of the press was taking shape. This meant the emergence of market-oriented newspapers that owe no binding partisan allegiance to either Chinese regime, taking a centrist road and identifying with the interests of Hong Kong over those of China--or more

accurately, regarding its concern for Hong Kong as a prerequisite for its concern for China. They are Hong Kong's papers, not China's. They focus keenly on local issues. But they also reserve a significant proportion of the space for reporting, deciphering, and criticizing the mysteries of Chinese politics because, in the last analysis, these are of salient concern to the Hong Kong citizens. Stratified by elite and mass taste cultures, they can be characterized as a group slightly right of the center--again, not out of loyalty to the KMT necessarily but a reflection of the Hong Kong consciousness.

This centrist category represents a strange assortment of papers decidedly different in taste and style, but they all share a primary Hong Kong identity. Although some of them had lived a longer life, not until 1970 did they form as a formidable market group recruiting the indigenously Hong Kong-born generation. The most successful mass-targeted Oriental Daily News boasts of having beaten its closest rival, Sing Pao, in circulation bid within a decade following its belated entry into the market in 1969. The Oriental Daily News has a circulation of 1.5 million copies, about twice as much as its closest rival, Sing Pao (Table 1). Making little pretense about political highmindedness, they pander to mass publics with local coverage, soft pornography, violence and horseracing tips--always written in an unashamedly simple, vulgar, lively Cantonese vernacular. However, positioning itself as a champion of the underdog

which it serves, many of whom had been the victims of Communist rule, the Oriental Daily News can be quite critical of China.

In contrast, Ming Pao rose both to claim the coveted respectability as a leading intellectual paper and to achieve a hard-won third place in circulation. To a large extent its rise was owed to virulent attacks on the Communists in the 1960s, and yet during that time it took no liking for Taiwan either. Its publisher and several editorial writers were on the assasination list of the Communists then, partly due to its aggressiveness and expertise on China watching, which has earned international acclaims. In recent years it has taken a sympathetic view towards Deng Xiao-ping's pragmatic policy while also hailing Taiwan's economic progress. All in all, however, Ming Pao professes in editorials its commitment to the status quo--i.e., political stability and economic prosperity--of Hong Kong while unfailingly urging both Chinese regimes to pursue rational and reformist policies. Besides, the Johnny-come-lately specialized paper Hong Kong Economic Journal, an offshoot of Ming Pao, is another successful example of the elite-centrist spectrum.

Journalistic Paradigms and Political Ideology

Since the ill-conceived leftist riot in 1967 nearly rocked the boat, the leftist forces took a heavg beating, from which it took years for them to recover. This can be characterized as a "lifeboat" mentality: "Hong Kong is the lifeboat; China is the sea. Those who have climbed into the

lifeboat naturally don't want to rock it."(note 16) Surveys have shown that the Hong Kong citizens are prepared to defend social stability at a very high cost; civil activities and even protests must not endanger this fragile fiber of stability. The press, irrespective of ideological color, has learned to respect this basic premise. Even Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po, major actors in the 1967 riot, conceded having committed a blunder thanks to the now-disgraced Gang of Four.

It is not to imply that rightist, centrist, and leftist papers often "see", explain, or "map" political reality objectively. They do not. Their construction of realities is significantly conditioned by different "journalistic paradigms"--defined as gestalt worldviews bred and steeped in ideological dogma and partisanship, that define the entities of the press concern, guide journalists as to where to look (and where no to look), as well as inform them about what to discover.(note 17) A number of case studies have confirmed that the leftist journalistic paradigm, while endorsing social stability in Hong Kong, tends to lend a more sympathetic ear to civil protests, and that the rightist journalistic paradigm is constantly antagonistic to civil protests, fearing that these activities are initiated by Communist conspiracies. The centrist journalistic paradigm is less pat or consistent, for it seems to be more detached and weigh each case on its merits. Specifically, for example, the CCP-linked papers framed the 1967 leftist riot in terms of China's Cultural Revolution, the KMT-linked rightist

papers interpreted from the vantage point of Taiwan's anti-Communist interests, while the mainstream rightist and centrist papers firmly stood by the Hong Kong government to maintain the status quo.

Journalistic paradigms also potently determine the way the press treats government information that is released daily by the Government Information Office. No doubt, ideological papers of both poles would habitually seek to exploit any opportunity in which the press can be mobilized in their favor to score a propaganda gain. The leftist papers are constantly suspicious and critical of the colonial administration, whose information may frequently turn out to be embarrassing or inconvenient for Communist propaganda. In contrast, the rightist papers are painfully stability-conscious. They know that owing to the symbiosis of geographical proximity and economic presence the Communists can outwit them in troublemaking, and that any efforts to frustrate the Communists can be viewed as a reverse victory for the KMT sympathizers. Although they would occasionally scold the government for not doing enough to help out "freedom fighters" or mainland refugees, toeing the government line may be the best and safest strategy. But overall, it is the centrist and mainstream conservative-rightist papers that are most supportive of the Hong Kong government.

IV. THE PRESS IN FLUX

The Decline of the Rightist Press

Kung Sheung Yat Po, the first successful popular newspaper that ever appeared in Hong Kong, has lived a glorious life until recent years. Founded in 1925, taken over by an established rich Sir Tung Ho in 1929 and succeeded by his son, former Nationalist government General Sh-li Ho in 1956, the paper was, like Sing Tao and Wah Kiu, highly valued by the Hong Kong government and, equally important, by the KMT: franchised by the former as one of the five legally valid advertising outlets, and awarded many prizes by the latter during its pre-1949 reign on the mainland and in post-1949 Taiwan.

Bitterly anti-Communist, the paper drew the public's attention, as early as 1925 in an inaugural editorial, to the "disaster of Communism" and China's unsuitability to Communist system. This passion has never wavered, due in part to the strength of General Ho's loyalty to (and other business interests with) the KMT; the radical fervor, which runs deeper than Sing Tao and Wah Kiu, parallels that of the KMT's organ, the Hong Kong Times.

The past 15 years have seen this once enormously powerful paper, with a fourth-ranked circulation standing at 65,000 in 1965, sunk into oblivion. Finally it met its fate on December 2, 1984. Citing vast financial loss as the cause, the publisher, Eric Ho, son of Gen. Ho, denied that the decision to nail the coffin of this 59-year-old paper was promoted by anxieties about an unfavorable political climate

after 1997. The Hong Kong Government, through the GIS, expressed its regrets.(note 18)

Rumored to have been under Taiwan's financial subsidy, Kung Sheung's staunch anti-Communism has been ominous of disaster. The sort of anti-Communism to which it is committed assumes more of a Taiwan's posture than of an indigenous Hong kong outlook. Taiwan claims to represent the sole legitimate government of all China; Hong Kong's antipathy towards Communist rule may not readily translate itself into loyalty to the KMT on Taiwan. Recognizing the continuing CCP-KMT rift as a political fact of life, the Hong Kong population is intent on preserving the status quo--freedom, stability, and prosperity--of Hong Kong. In short, they protect Hong Kong's, not Taiwan's, status quo. In the ensuing years after 1949 Taiwan's anti-Communism and Hong Kong's were arguably more compatible because Taiwan symbolized the aspirations of sizable Hong Kong refugees to return to the mainland. But time has dealt a blow to this dream. As the emerging generations, born and raised in Hong Kong, have a dim memory of the hardship from which many of their parents had suffered, Taiwan's anti-Communist enthusiasm has lost much of its appeal.(note 19)

Put this in perspective, it is evident why Kung Sheung fails. Anti-Communism, a major factor of success for Kung Sheung during the fifties and the sixties, worked in the opposite direction to cause its demise during the seventies and the eighties. The world has changed, Kung Sheung has

not. Epitomizing the growing autonomy of Hong Kong in an ironical way, its demise was due to the predicament in which it was caught between unflagging anti-Communism and the sharply dwindled hard-core first-generation refugee population. Over the years Kung Sheung has seen, with reluctance, its readership base stolen away in great strides by the rising centrist, Hong Kong-oriented papers.

The Hong Kong Times was established as a propaganda bridgehead by the KMT in the wake of its defeat on the mainland in 1949. But its readership has been small and propaganda weak. The year following its founding Chiang Kai-skek was reportedly furious about the report that the paper distributed only 200 copies each day. Lei, who was dispatched to investigate the case, surmised that although the rumor was much exaggerated the circulation was undoubtedly limited. Lin, an onetime editorial writer of the Times, put its circulation in the range of 25,000 to 50,000.(note 20) Presumably the Times' stiff, hard-line anti-Communist rhetoric seeks to serve the pleasure of party bureaucrats in Taipei more ardently than to appeal to a wider cross-section of audience in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Times' rhetoric stood unchanged in a rapidly changing environment, thus creating a credibility gap. In contrast, Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po have busily contradicted themselves in tandem with the relentless political tumults in mainland China. Like dancing to different tunes, they are as adamantly disparaging about the

Gang of Four in the post-Mao era as they were feverishly toeing the radical line during the Cultural Revolution. Because of the 1967 riot and subsequently as a mouthpiece of China's radical left, their circulations plunged into below 10,000 during the late 1960s and the 1970s--a damage from which they are still making a gradual recovery. Serving the current united front policy, they wear a smiling face zealously rooting for China's Four Modernizations program and, as if to placate anxieties, repeating the assurance that China will respect the status quo of Hong Kong and that of Taiwan in the event of an ultimate reunification. Contrary to the rightist Hong Kong Times, the two Communist papers are published exclusively for overseas Chinese consumption and not admitted into China. Therefore, they can afford to be amazingly flexible in shifting propaganda tactics, but this is a mark of inconsistency that paradoxically undermines their credibility in the long haul.

Press Freedom after 1997: The Press in Transition

Attention is being focused on the viability of press freedom after Hong Kong returns to Chinese sovereignity in 1997. China has promised Hong Kong a unique status of autonomy under an "one country, two systems" scheme; therefore, the present way of life and socioeconomic system will stay unaltered for 50 years after 1997. Power will be gradually transferred to the local poeple, who will manage local affairs with Beijing's blessings but without

interference. Specifically, according to Article 5 of the Sino-British joint declaration, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government "shall maintain the rights and freedoms as provided for by the laws previously in force in Hong Kong, including freedom of the person, of the press, of assembly, of association, to form and join unions, of correspondence, of travel, of strike, of demonstration, of choice of occupation, of academic research, of belief..." These freedoms will be protected in the form of a Basic Law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as part of Article 31 of the PRC Constitution. In June 1985, a drafting committee for the Basic Law was named, comprising 23 Hong Kong representatives (invariably from the establishment) and another 36 on behalf of the Beijing authorities. The committee is in no way representative of demographic cross-section of the population, as more than half of its members are over 60 in age and all present no offense to Beijing. It remains as a point of contention as to whether Hong Kong or Beijing holds the ultimate right of interpretation should the Basic Law clash with party directives.

No predictions can be totally safe. Optimists do not feel that press freedom is in obvious or immediate peril. The Chinese leaders, especially Deng Xiao-ping and Premier Zhao Zi-yang, have taken pains to reiterate their intention to fulfil the promises, claiming that China has never broken any international treaty--even in times of domestic turmoil during the Cultural Revolution. More important, optimists

argue that if China is to achieve economic growth, it will need a stable and prosperous Hong Kong for support, which rests on the preservation of freedoms, including press freedom. Above all, optimists argue, China must succeed in Hong Kong to have any reasonable chance of wooing Taiwan.

Yet pessimists are not in short supply. When Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was prodded by journalists at Britain's morality for "abandoning" Hong Kong to a Communist regime, she defended the treaty as the best possible deal available under the circumstances.(note 21) Failing to retain administrative rights in exchange for the return of sovereignty, it appears that Britain has no alternative but to seek an honorable withdrawal from Hong Kong, while hoping that China will make good on its offers. If China should for whatever reasons fail to live up to the treaty, it is doubtful that Britain will summon its will for a fight. Britain's future vital interests lie in China rather than in Hong Kong.

There is also no denying that China's own record, especially in the ruthless mass purging of journalists during the Cultural Revolution, gives little cause for celebration. (note 22) Deng's cracking down on the Democracy Wall and the more recent anti-spiritual pollution campaign in 1983 further deepened the entrenched suspicion. As if to add oil to the fire, China sent Hong Kong into panic by sounding out conflicting signals during the course of negotiation. Pessimists fear that freedom of speech and freedom of the

press are probably most at risk among all the freedoms and rights that Hong Kong now enjoys. For one thing, Communist China, including the current pragmatic regime, is not noted for toleration of dissent. For another, it is inconceivable to pessimists why China will grant freedom to the Hong Kong press while denying it to its own press. If the examples of Singapore and Taiwan teach a lesson, it may be that press freedom is not inherently central to the stablity and prosperity of Hong Kong.

The People's Daily carried a lengthy speech by the CCP secretary-general, Hu Yaobang at the party's central committee secretariat (April 14, 1985). While reiterating that literary writers were entitled to express their feelings, Hu insisted that "journalism should reflect what the party and Government say, and espouse the party line and Government policies." Hu said the national economic reforms do not mean that Chinese can set up private newspapers and indiscriminately espouse their personal opinions. Although Hong Kong and 1997 were not mentioned in the speech, it raises issues as to how viable press freedom is likely to be in a "one country two systems" environment. Xu Xiatun, director of Xinhua's Hong Kong branch or equivalent of an underground embassy, has hinted that Hong Kong reporters while working in China will be treated as nationals rather than foreign correspondents. Unlike foreign correspondents who can be expelled at worst, Hong Kong reporters, holding a home-returning permit to cover news in China, may run the

risk of imprisonment or "reform through labor" on charges of alleged espionage or leaking national secrets.

Nor is the conduct of the Chinese press a source of strong confidence. Despite its characteristic restraint, the Hong Kong government has encountered skirmishes with the press from time to time. Where the principle of press freedom is involved, the Chinese press, reputed to be timid and complacent in dealing with the government, often takes comfort in letting the more aggressive English press fight out big battles. The Chinese press is a beneficiary of the freedom which others accidentally fight on its behalf. Given this and what follows, will it stand up to Beijing when the interests of Hong Kong appear to be injured?

At this writing intriquing signs of change are already in sight.(note 23) Now that "the 1997 question" is irrevocable, an array of publications once considered as centrist or even mainstream conservative-rightist seem to be reponding favorably to the cooptative overtures by Xinhua (New China) News Agency, Beijing's main organ of influence in the territory. Corps of journalists have rushed to take junket trips to China under the auspices of All-China Journalists Association. Advertisements for mainland stores and products gain prominent display in the pages of Wah Kiu, which began printing Xinhua's copy in addition to Taiwan's Central News Agency. As a calculated move, when Xu Jiatun became new head of Xinhua's Hong Kong branch, that news was deliberately "scooped" by Sing Tao. Beijing has extended an

open invitation to Sing Tao's influential publisher, Sally Aw, and conservative editor, Ding Zhou, for what promises to be a grand visit. Aw has taken a deliberately detached yet inoffensive posture, while moving the headquarters of the parent company that owns Sing Tao out of Hong Kong to Australia.

Reporters working for papers traditionally unsympathetic to the Communist cause were put at an advantage over their leftist rivals when they covered the National People's Congress and other events in Beijing. The once critical posture of Ming Pao is now giving way to praises lavished on the farsightedness and supreme wisdom of the "one country, two systems" concept, even commending it as a prescription for solving the world's outstanding conflicts. Publisher Louis Cha has not only been warmly received by top Chinese leaders many times but been named as a member of the Basic Law drafting committee. By the same token, a self-appointed voice of the underlog, the Oriental Daily News has not only toned down its criticism of Communism but also permitted one of its columns to regurgitate much of China's official press releases.

This seemingly sudden change of heart by the press can be attributed to personal advantage, realism, and Xinhua's active public relations. Now that the dust over the future of Hong Kong seems settled, it is imperative that the press learn to accept this new reality and try to make the best out of the circumstances. It may guard vigilently against any

violation of the the spirit of the negotiations, but continuing to protest violently against Chinese sovereignty may fall on the public's deaf ear. Moreover, Xinhua, vis-a-vis the GIS, has increasingly become a major source of centralized dissemination of information regarding the Basic Law and the Sino-British transition team. The press must tone down its criticism of the CCP in order to court Xinhua's favors. What is more, as the mainland Chinese capital assumes an even more significant posture in the Hong Kong economy and foreign capital vies for China's market, if the press fails to soften its adversary stance towards China it may do itself a disfavor by undercutting advertising revenues. The effectiveness of Xinhua's banquet tactics directed primarily at the Chinese-language press publishers and editors is, of course, not to be discounted.

The destiny of the Hong Kong Times after 1997 is undecided. Typical of flexibility, Deng Xiao-ping has urged the KMT rightist institutions and personnel to stay, even to criticize the Communist Party, provided that they would not make trouble or create "Two Chinas." This notwithstanding, China has blasted the KMT elements for inciting anxieties about the new political change. While the wish of the KMT to embarrass its Communist foe cannot be discounted, given the deep-seated and widespread Communist phobia that exists among the populace,(note 24) putting the major, if not the sole, blame on the KMT may not prove totally realistic. It is also ambiguous as to where the line between criticizing the CCP

and making troubles can be drawn. Inasmuch as the Hong Kong Times does not exert substantial influence, the significance of its continuing presence is primarily symbolic in testing the limits of China's will and words. Finally, in the wake of the demise of Kung Sheung Yat Po, the KMT lost little time in publishing a Chiang Kai-skek Daily News in 1985, whose precarious fate remains to be tested politically and commercially.

In view of the anticipated erosion of press freedom in Hong Kong, the right-left discord among the Chinese press in America gains all the more significance. The press systems in Hong Kong and America bear a close resemblance to each other so far as relation to modern Chinese politics goes. The rightist-centrist-leftist "journalistic paradigms" are so durable that they will continue to structure the press interpretation of the CCP-KMT rift. Alongside this, it is observed that the press has increasingly put aside partisan differences to speak for the Chinese American community as a whole vis-a-vis other ethnic groups in the total context of American interest-group politics.(note 25)

NOTES

1. You-lan Lin, Xiang-kang-bao-ye-fa-zhan-sh (The

History of Press Development in Hong Kong) (Taipei: World, 1977); Hanqi Fang, Zhong-guo-qien-dai-bao-kang-sh (The Recent History of the Chinese Press) (Shanxi: People's, 1981),two volumnes.

2. See, for example, Lee-Hsia Hsu Ting, Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900-1949 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

3. Tao-feng Zhou, Jing-li (Going Through) (Hong Kong: Joint, 1978, second ed.), pp. 133-153.

4. Ibid.

5. Ambrose Y. C. King, "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level," Asian Survey, 15(1975):422-439.

6. Peter Harris, Hong Kong: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1978).

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8. Siu-kai Lau, Society and Politics in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982), pp. 157-172.

9. Kowloon Disturbances 1966, Repart of Commission of Inquiry (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1967), p. 218.

10. Chin-Chuan Lee, "Partisan Press Coverage of Government News in Hong Kong," Journalism Quarterly (in press).

11. Fang, op. cit. pp. 515-516.

12. For details see James C. Y. Shen, The Law and Mass Media in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press,

1972); Lin, op. cit., pp. 115-152.

13. Hong Kong Standard, January 16, 1981; Standing Committee on Pressure Groups (SCOPG), "Information Paper for Chief Secretary's Committee Monitoriing of Presure Group Activities," Home Affairs Branch, Hong Kong Government.

14. Hong Kong: Report of the Year 1983 (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1984), pp. 188-189. The number of newspapers, which had been stablized around 100 for a decade, abruptly dropped to 55, partly because of a price increase that drove many out of the market.

15. Kowloon Disturbances, op. cit.

16. Miners, op. cit.; Lau; J. S. Hoadley, "Political Participation of Hong Kong Chinese Patterns and Trends," Asian Survey, 13,6 (1973):604-616.

17. See Joseph Man Chan and Chin-Chuan Lee, "Journalistic 'Paradigm' on Civil Protests: A Case Study in Hong Kong," in Andrew Arno and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., The News Media in National and International Conflict (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984); Chin-Chuan Lee and Yuet-lin Lee, "Constructing Partisan Realities by the Press: A Case of Riot in Hong Kong," presented at the Midwest Political Science Association annual conference, Chicago, April 1985; and Lee, op. cit.. Besides, for editorials and commentaries from leading newspapers about the Sino-British negotiation over Hong Kong, see Joseph Y.S. Cheng, ed., Hong Kong: In Search of a Future (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.215-236.

18. Ming Pao, December 3, 1984; Focus News Weekly, no. 11, pp. 34-35, December 8, 1984.

19. In the year of 1951 alone the population jumped from 600,000 to 2.36 million due to the huge influx of the mainland refugees. By the late 1970's the first generation Chinese--locally born, and under 30--comprised 60% of the population.

20. Zhen Lei, The Memoir of Zhen Lei (Hong Kong: ' Seventies, 1978) pp. 17-18; Lin, op. cit., p. 171.

21. See Ming Pao, December 24, 1984, for a transcript of Thatcher's press conference held in Hong Kong in the wake of initialling the declaration in Beijing.

22. See, for example, Chin-Chuan Lee, "Turbulent Media in the Charging China," in Media Imperialism Reconsidered (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), epilogue, pp. 203-237.

23. See, for example, "'United Front' in Hongkong," Asiaweek, December 2, 1984, pp.22-23; Emily Lau, "Threats to Press Freedom From Outside--and Within," Far Eastern Economic Review, October 25, 1984, pp. 54-56; Keng Lu, "Why Is Aw Sian (Sally Aw) Trying Her Best?" Bai-xieng, December 1, 1983.

24. A stratified random sample survey of 6,000 people released by Survey Research Hongkong (Ming Pao, November 27, 1984, editorial) indicates that 16% rest assured by the Sino-British treaty, 35% feel largely satisfied but call for further assurance on specific points, 41% say they remain unsettled or unconvinced until the policy is actually implemented, 4% are totally unsatisfied or unsettled, and the

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remaining 5% don't know. Interestingly, the level of satisfaction is negatively correlated with age, education, and income.

25. The author is presently undertaking a research project on this subject.